

01 APR 2005

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
15 April 2004 (15.04.2004)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2004/030897 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: B29C 70/46, 70/54

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/GB2003/004232

(22) International Filing Date:
30 September 2003 (30.09.2003)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
0222753.6 2 October 2002 (02.10.2002) GB

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(81) Designated States (national): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

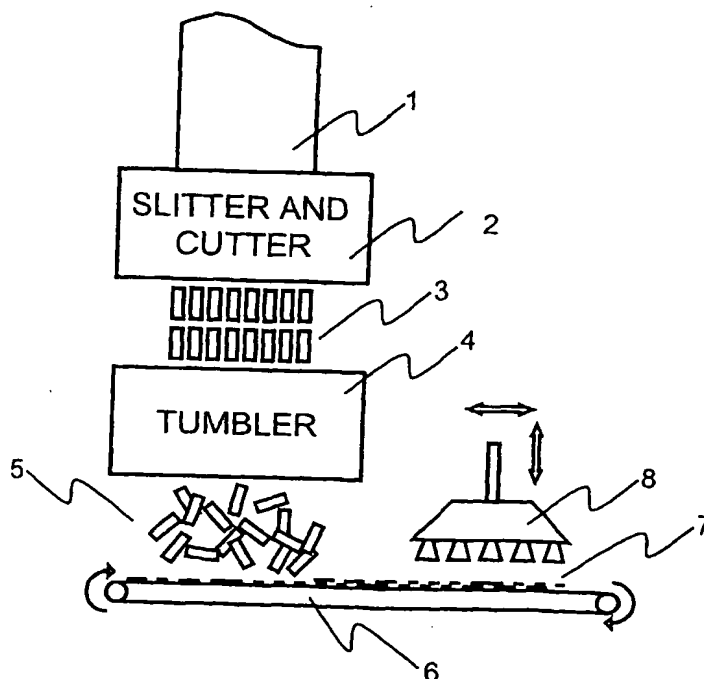
(84) Designated States (regional): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Declarations under Rule 4.17:

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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: METHOD OF PRODUCTION OF COMPOSITE MATERIALS



(57) Abstract: A method of producing a laminate comprising the following steps: (a) Forming patches from a substantially unidirectional fabric, treated with a resin; (b) Substantially randomising the orientation of said patches; (c) Distributing a plurality of said patches in layers around a former; (d) Causing said layers of patches to amalgamate by means of activation of the resin treatment.

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— of inventorship (Rule 4.17(iv)) for US only

Published:

— with international search report

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METHOD OF PRODUCTION
OF ADVANCED COMPOSITE MATERIALS

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Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a method of producing advanced composite materials with a substantially laminar construction.

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Review of the Art Known to the Applicant(s)

Composite materials have found great application in recent decades, due in part to their ability to combine high strength with the ease of forming complex shapes. One particular class of composite materials, to which this current invention relates, uses fibres made of various materials, bonded together with a resin. The fibres themselves have an inherent strength combined with a flexibility, that allows them to be formed into complex shapes and then bound together with an appropriate resin. The strength of the composite material derives from the inherent strength of the fibres combined with the strength of the bond between

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them. The desirable mechanical properties of the fibres are intrinsically anisotropic, in that they lie predominantly along the direction of the fibre. However, in the manufacture of articles from such composite materials it is sometimes required that the finished article has isotropic strength characteristics. This design requirement has led to a number of technical solutions, which will be described below, each of which exhibits a number of deficiencies.

The class of composite materials to which this invention refers are known as Polymer Matrix Composites, or Fibre Reinforced Polymers. They use a polymeric resin as a continuous matrix and contain a variety of fibres. Commonly used fibres include carbon fibre, glass, aramid and boron. The overall properties of such composites result from the individual properties of the fibre and of the resin, the ratio of fibre to resin in the composite and the geometry and orientation of the fibres within the composite.

A wide range of resin types are used in the manufacture of resin-fibre composites. These resins or polymers may be thermoplastic, or more usually thermosetting. A wide range of such thermosetting polymers are used in the composite industry; polyester, vinylester and epoxy are common. Properties of the resin are chosen to be compatible with the fibres to be used in the composite. For example, it is important that the adhesive properties of the polymer are such that a strong bond is made between the fibres. In this respect, epoxy systems are regarded as offering high performance. The mechanical properties of the resin system are also important, particularly the tensile strength and stiffness of the cured polymer, as well as the shrinkage of the resin during its curing period. In this respect, again, epoxy resin systems are known to produce low shrinkage rates.

Among the range of fibres available for use in composite manufacture, three are most common in the industry. Glass fibres are typically used either as yarns (closely associated bundles of twisted filaments or strands), rovings (a more loosely associated bundle of untwisted filaments or strands), or spun yarn fibres.

Aramid fibres made from aromatic polyamides, such as those sold under the trade mark 'Kevlar' have high strength and low density and have found wide application in protective materials. Carbon fibres, produced by high temperature treatment of polymer fibres, have been used for the last 40 years or so and have high stiffness, tensile and compressive strength, as well as favourable corrosion-resistance properties.

Methods of construction of fibre and resin composite materials fall into two broad classes. The first of these, referred to as 'Wet Lay-up' involves adding liquid resin to the fibres at the stage of forming the moulded product. In this mode of processing, a relatively large resin to fibre ratio is produced, and composites of this form are recognised in the art as having inherent weakness. The second mode of construction uses pre-impregnated fibres, and is generally regarded as being superior to the wet lay-up technique. These so-called 'pre-impregnated' fibres are well known in the art, and will not be needlessly described here. Within this class there are three approaches that have been used, as follows:

Pre-impregnated Unidirectional and Woven Fabric

Sheets of fabric made from the required fibres may be stacked to form a desired laminate thickness. The sheets may be unidirectional - i.e. with the fibres running in one direction - or woven, with a variety of weave options. This allows a controlled orientation of the fibres so that a manufactured component can be stronger and/or stiffer in the direction of the fibre, in an analogous way to the grain of wood. The weave of the fabric itself is comprised of 'tows' which themselves may comprise many thousands of fibres or filaments.

The alignment and bundling of fibres into a tow allows a very strong resin bond to take place between the fibres, unlike the random fibre methods to be described below. This alignment allows the resin content of the composite to be reduced, and to be more uniformly distributed amongst the fibres.

Problems arise, however, when a homogenous construction is required, and the strength and stiffness in a manufactured article needs to be isotropic (i.e. not varying with direction), at least with respect to the major spatial axes. The use of a number of such sheets to create the required thickness in the product introduces an interlaminar weakness. Interlaminar failure and delamination significantly compromise a laminate's structural integrity and performance, and is a common failure mode for composite materials constructed in this manner.

Each ply of fabric is anisotropic in terms of its planar mechanical properties. So, in order to construct an isotropic laminate a significant number of plies are required, but the problem of interlaminar differences are inherent even though the laminate as a whole is quasi-isotropic.

The construction of a quasi-isotropic structure requires a significant number of plies which in turn requires a level of symmetry of fibre direction through the plane and sectional view of a bi-directional thickness in order to avoid distortion of the manufactured article through eg. thermal or shrinkage mechanisms. This requires increased care, and hence manufacturing costs, in the laminating process.

When this type of material is required for complex shapes with tight compound curves, specific tailoring is needed with both woven and unidirectional material. The drapeability of the fabric used is key to the success of this manufacturing technique. Individual plies are cut and spliced to enable the material to conform to the required shape. This can increase interlaminar stresses over a large area.

Chopped Random Fibre and Continuous Random Fibre

Fibre-resin composites may also be made using chopped or continuous random fibres. The use of such fibres requires less effort, and hence reduces the cost of

components. The random nature of the fibre orientation means that a construction can be made with essentially isotropic properties.

5 However, the reduction in cross-linking between parallel fibres is very significant and reduces the overall performance of the laminate. The inherently random nature of the fibre placement causes some areas of the product to be thicker than others unless significant pressure is used to help the distribution, but this contributes further to the reduction in laminate performance as the fibres are distorted in this process.

10 Furthermore, the random bridging of fibres leaves large voids that get filled with resin. This increases the weight of the component. Therefore the control on resin to fibre ratio is poor which generally means the mechanical properties are worse than with pre-impregnated fabric.

15 Finally, the Fibre Area Weight (FAW) - i.e. the weight of a given area of a sheet or product - is not as consistent in this mode of manufacture, as may be obtained by use of pre-impregnated unidirectional or woven fabric.

20 Random Chopped Fibre in Moulding Compound

25 A final way of constructing resin-fibre laminates is by the use of random chopped fibres in a moulding compound. In a number of applications, for example in the manufacture of protective helmets, an unsaturated polyester resin moulding compound is used, reinforced with pre-impregnated glass fibre. This method usually uses comparatively short fibres, with a consequently adverse effect on the material properties. The overall performance of this type of material is recognised to be significantly worse than that produced by the methods described above.

30 The present invention addresses these problems of conventional resin-fibre laminate technology, and produces a laminate that is essentially anisotropic, has

favourable mechanical properties in terms of strength and stiffness, and is significantly less prone to de-lamination failure.

Summary of the Invention

In the broadest definition of the invention, there is provided a method of producing a laminate comprising the following steps:

- (a) Forming patches from a substantially unidirectional fabric, treated with a resin
- (b) Substantially randomising the orientation of said patches
- (c) Distributing a plurality of said patches in layers around a former
- (d) Causing said layers of patches to amalgamate by means of activation of the resin treatment.

Advantageously, the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a suction device.

Advantageously also, the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a pneumatic conveyor.

Preferably, in any of the definitions of the methods of the invention, the said patches have an average surface area no greater than 20% of the surface area of the layer formed in step (c).

More preferably, in any of the definitions of the methods of the invention, a multiplicity of patch shapes and/or sizes is employed.

Included within the scope of the invention, is a method of producing a laminate substantially as described herein, with reference to and as illustrated by any appropriate combination of the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

5 Figure 1 is a schematic process diagram illustrating the formation of fabric patches, their randomisation, and their presentation for further processing.

Figure 2 is a schematic process diagram illustrating the formation of patches, their randomisation, and subsequent conveyance to a moulding process.

10 Figure 3 illustrates a range of patch shapes suitable for use in the current invention.

Figure 4 illustrates a typical random arrangement of patches in a composite polymer.

15 Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of a cross-section through a composite laminate as made by existing technology.

20 Figure 6 is a schematic diagram showing a cross-section through a composite laminate made according to the method of the current invention.

Description of the Preferred Embodiment

25 To overcome the deficiencies of existing methods of composite manufacture, the method of the present invention comprises the use of a large number of randomly-orientated patches of orientated fibres. Preferably, these are patches of unidirectional fabric, i.e. a fabric in which the majority of fibres run in one direction only. It is commonly understood in the art that such unidirectional fabrics may have a small amount of fibre or other material running in another direction, with the intention of holding the primary fibres in position. It is
30 preferable that the unidirectional fabric used in the method of manufacture of the

preferable that the unidirectional fabric used in the method of manufacture of the composite is pre-impregnated, or pre-treated, with an appropriate resin system in order to produce a high fibre to resin ratio in the final composite. This is difficult to achieve with the Wet Lay-up technique. The patches used in the manufacture of this 'Random Stamp Laminate' are chosen to have a size and shape appropriate to the geometry of the required final product, as will be discussed below. The laminate is then formed by layering, in an essentially random way, the patches to the required shape of the final articles. Following this layering process, the patches are compressed if required and then cured in the conventional way, appropriate to the resin system in use.

One embodiment of such a production process is illustrated in Figure 1. Unidirectional fabric 1 as sheet or roll material is fed into apparatus 2 comprising the means for producing the fabric patches 3 of the required range of sizes and shapes. The patches 3 are fed into apparatus such as a tumbler 4 providing means for randomly orientating the patches 3. On leaving the tumbler 4 the randomly orientated patches 5 may fall onto a conveyer belt 6 to form a loose, randomly orientated layer 7 of patches. The randomly orientated patches 7 may then be conveniently picked up by use of a suction head 8 for transfer to a product mould by, for example, robotic means.

In an analogous way, the randomly orientated patches 5 could be fed into a hopper for eventual delivery to such a suction head device.

Figure 2 shows another embodiment of the production process whereby the randomly orientated patches 5 are conveyed from the tumbler 4 by means of a pneumatic conveyor. Such conveyors are known for handling powdered or granular materials. Control of temperature in such a conveyor can be used to prevent patches sticking to each other, or to the conveyor, during transport. The patches may then be conveniently deposited in layers, to the required geometry, optionally with the assistance of a vacuum-forming device.

5 The shape and size of the patches used to form the random stamp laminate may be chosen according to the size and geometry of the object to be manufactured. Any particular object to be manufactured may use patches of a range of sizes and shapes, either distributed randomly over the surface of the object, or patches of a particular shape or size may be positioned, or orientated, at particular locations on the object to provide localised areas of specific strength characteristics, such as local anisotropy. It is to be appreciated that there is a trade off between the ability to follow a curved geometry and the strength of the composite produced. Small patches will be more able to follow complex geometries, but at the expense of the strength that derives from long fibre length.

10 Figure 3 illustrates a range of suitable geometries for the patches. All the patches depicted are capable of tessellating, thus making most efficient use of the sheet or roll unidirectional fabric, although this property is not essential for operation of the present method. Referring to Figure 3, appropriate shapes depicted are a rectangle 10, a parallelogram 11, a trapezium 12, a chevron 13, a hexagon 14 and a curved arrow 15. The lines in each of the shapes depicted in Figure 3 indicate the preferred direction of the fibres in the unidirectional sheet, by providing the most efficient way to maximise the fibre length within the patch.

20 Figure 4 depicts, again schematically, a small section 16 of a composite laminate made according to the method of this invention. This view, perpendicular to the plane of the randomly orientated patches 17, shows a typical arrangement of the patches. In this instance, rectangular patches of a uniform size are depicted, but a range of sizes and shapes could equally be used as required.

25 A key advantage of this method of production of advanced composite materials is that the problem of delamination under stress is significantly reduced. Figure 5 shows a schematic representation of a section through a typical six ply laminate composite made according to existing methodology. The two central plies 18 as

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illustrated are formed of unidirectional fabric with the fibre direction running normal to the plane of the diagram. The two outer plies 19 are similarly orientated. The two intermediate plies 20 have unidirectional fibres lying along the plane of the diagram, as indicated by the horizontal stripes. It can be seen that in this construction there are clear interlaminar 'strata' 21. In the final composite, of course, these would be composed of the resin material. They are, however, a plane of weakness in the material along which delamination failure often occurs.

By contrast, Figure 6 is a diagrammatic representation of a section through a composite made according to the method of the current invention. It will be appreciated that the diagram is schematic, and that in order to clarify the description, the patches are depicted as being thicker, shorter and more kinked than would be preferable. The diagram shows sections through a large number of patches 22, 23, 24, each composed of unidirectional fabric, and each patch orientated in a random fashion as described earlier. As a result of the random way in which the patches are placed on the former, a number of features of the invention are apparent. Whilst some patches may abut each other, although with a random orientation of the fabric, others, for example those depicted as patches 24 overlap at their edges. Still further patches, such as those depicted at 23, traverse at least part of the thickness of the composite laminate. It will be noted that unlike the traditional laminates depicted in Figure 5, the laminate produced by the current invention has a much less stratified structure. These features contribute in great part to the improved characteristics of the composite. The overlapping and thickness-traversing patches serve to prevent delamination, and to spread stresses throughout the structure of the composite.

The invention is defined in the claims that follow and in which the term "unidirectional fabric" is understood to encompass fabrics in which most of the fibres are aligned in substantially the same direction, and may contain fibres running in other directions with the intention of holding the primary fibres in

position. Typically, in the art, more than 75% of the fibres are aligned in substantially the same direction.

5 The term "former" is understood to be any means of causing the spatial association of patches. The term former includes, therefore, means commonly referred to as a mould, which may contain a number of convex and concave curves. The term former also includes substantially planar surfaces.

10 The term "resin" is understood to include any polymeric material capable of binding the fibres of the fabric together, and "means of activation" is understood to include heat, radiation, catalysis, chemical reaction and drying.

15 Laminates produced according to the method of this invention are described in the co-pending application filed by our agent the same day, under the title 'Advanced Composite Materials'.

CLAIMS

1. A method of producing a laminate comprising the following steps:

- 5 (a) Forming patches from a substantially unidirectional fabric, treated with a resin
- (b) Substantially randomising the orientation of said patches
- (c) Distributing a plurality of said patches in layers around a former
- 10 (d) Causing said layers of patches to amalgamate by means of activation of the resin treatment.

2. The method of Claim 1 wherein the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a suction device.

15 3. The method of Claim 1 wherein the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a pneumatic conveyor.

20 4. The method of any of the preceding claims in which the said patches have an average surface area of no greater than 20% of the surface area of the layer formed in step (c).

5. The method of any of the preceding claims in which a multiplicity of patch shapes and/or sizes is employed.

25 6. A method of producing a laminate substantially as described herein, with reference to and as illustrated by any appropriate combination of the accompanying drawings.

Figure 1

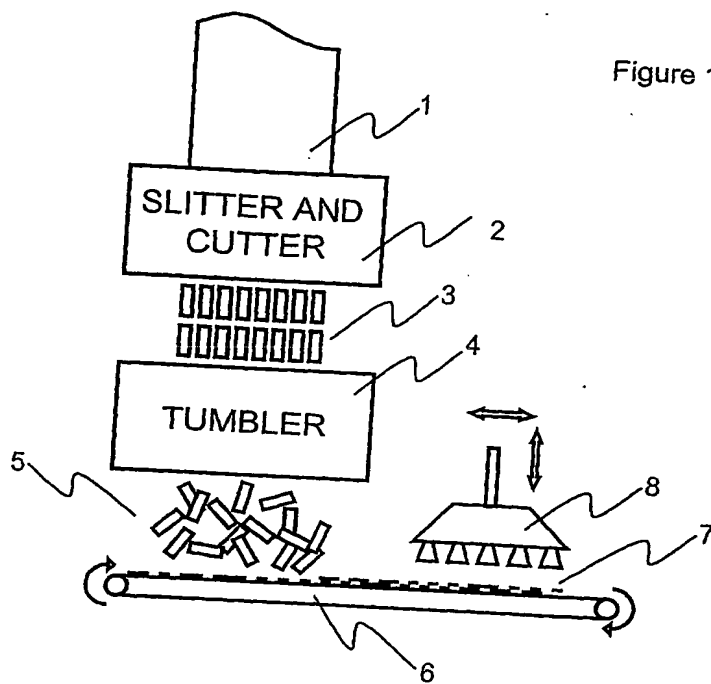


Figure 2

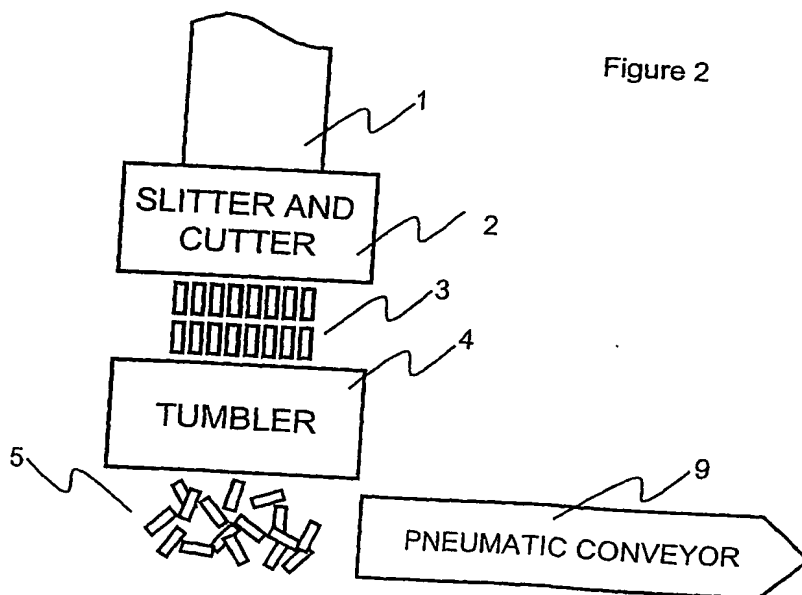


Figure 3

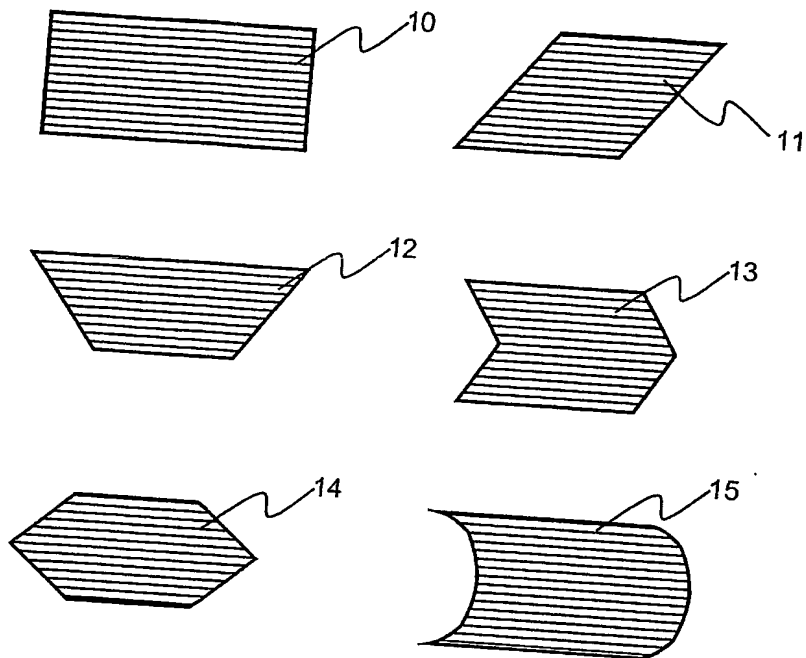


Figure 4

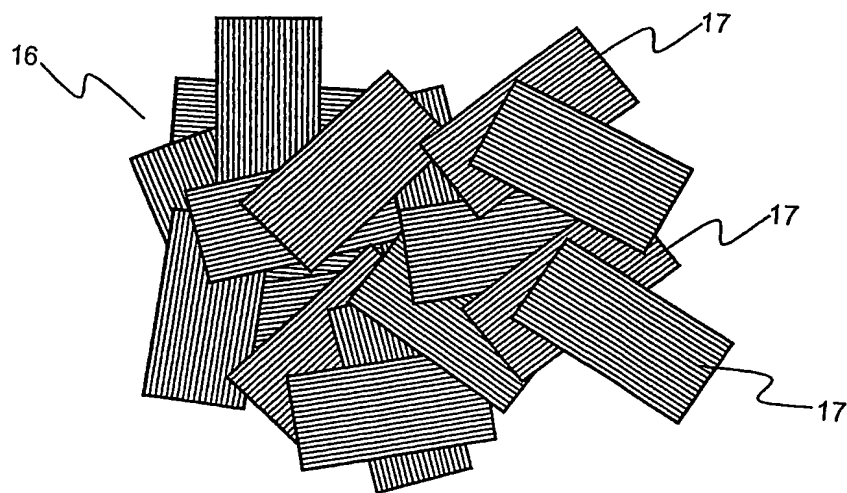


Figure 5

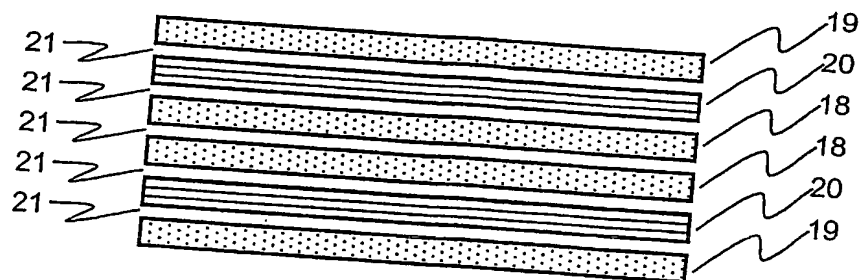
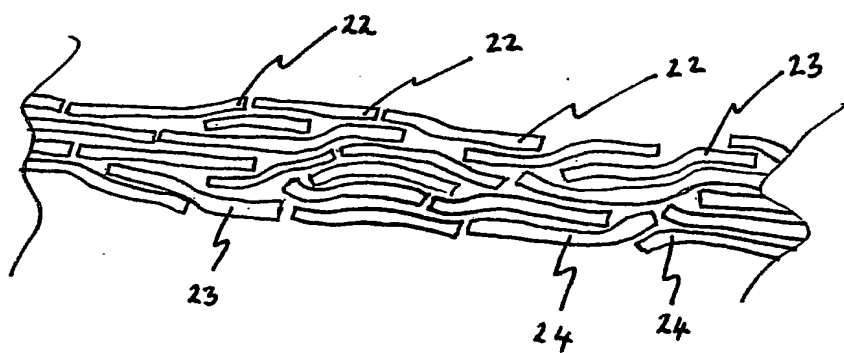


Figure 6



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Int'l Application No
PCT/GB 03/04232

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 B29C70/46 B29C70/54

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 B29C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)
EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 916 477 A (DUQUEINE GILLES) 19 May 1999 (1999-05-19) the whole document	1-6
X	GB 2 216 531 A (BLATCHFORD & SONS LTD) 11 October 1989 (1989-10-11) page 3, line 32 - line 35; claims	1,4-6
X	FR 2 740 149 A (YKK CORP) 25 April 1997 (1997-04-25) the whole document	1,4-6

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

16 January 2004

Date of mailing of the international search report

23/01/2004

Name and mailing address of the ISA

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/GB 03/04232

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Int'l Application No
PCT/GB 03/04232

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 B29C70/46 B29C70/54

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 B29C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)
EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ

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International Application No
PCT/GB 03/04232

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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From the INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

**NOTICE INFORMING THE APPLICANT OF THE
COMMUNICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
APPLICATION TO THE DESIGNATED OFFICES**

(PCT Rule 47.1(c), first sentence)

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Date of mailing (day/month/year) 15 April 2004 (15.04.2004)		
Applicant's or agent's file reference PDGW/LAM1		IMPORTANT NOTICE
International application No. PCT/GB2003/004232	International filing date (day/month/year) 30 September 2003 (30.09.2003)	Priority date (day/month/year) 02 October 2002 (02.10.2002)
Applicant CARBON FIBRE TECHNOLOGIES LIMITED et al		

1. Notice is hereby given that the International Bureau has communicated, as provided in Article 20, the international application to the following designated Offices on the date indicated above as the date of mailing of this notice:

AU, AZ, BY, CH, CN, CO, DZ, EP, HU, JP, KG, KP, KR, MD, MK, MZ, RU, TM, US

In accordance with Rule 47.1(c), third sentence, those Offices will accept the present notice as conclusive evidence that the communication of the international application has duly taken place on the date of mailing indicated above and no copy of the international application is required to be furnished by the applicant to the designated Office(s).

2. The following designated Offices have waived the requirement for such a communication at this time:

AE, AG, AL, AM, AP, AT, BA, BB, BG, BR, BZ, CA, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EA, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, ID, IL, IN, IS, KE, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MG, MN, MW, MX, NI, NO, NZ, OA, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW

The communication will be made to those Offices only upon their request. Furthermore, those Offices do not require the applicant to furnish a copy of the international application (Rule 49.1(a-bis)).

3. Enclosed with this notice is a copy of the international application as published by the International Bureau on 15 April 2004 (15.04.2004) under No. WO 2004/030897

4. **TIME LIMITS** for filing a demand for international preliminary examination and for entry into the national phase

The applicable time limit for entering the national phase will, subject to what is said in the following paragraph, be 30 MONTHS from the priority date, not only in respect of any elected Office if a demand for international preliminary examination is filed before the expiration of 19 months from the priority date, but also in respect of any designated Office, in the absence of filing of such demand, where Article 22(1) as modified with effect from 1 April 2002 applies in respect of that designated Office. For further details, see *PCT Gazette* No. 44/2001 of 1 November 2001, pages 19926, 19932 and 19934, as well as the *PCT Newsletter*, October and November 2001 and February 2002 issues.

In practice, time limits other than the 30-month time limit will continue to apply, for various periods of time, in respect of certain designated or elected Offices. For regular updates on the applicable time limits (20, 21, 30 or 31 months, or other time limit), Office by Office, refer to the *PCT Gazette*, the *PCT Newsletter* and the *PCT Applicant's Guide*, Volume II, National Chapters, all available from WIPO's Internet site, at <http://www.wipo.int/pct/en/index.html>.

For filing a demand for international preliminary examination, see the *PCT Applicant's Guide*, Volume I/A, Chapter IX. Only an applicant who is a national or resident of a PCT Contracting State which is bound by Chapter II has the right to file a demand for international preliminary examination (at present, all PCT Contracting States are bound by Chapter II).

It is the applicant's sole responsibility to monitor all these time limits.

The International Bureau of WIPO
34, chemin des Colombettes
1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland

Authorized officer

Gijsbertus Beijer - Carlos Roy

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Telephone No.(41-22) 338.91.11

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT (PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

01 APR 2005

Applicant's or agent's file reference PDGWLAM1	FOR FURTHER ACTION See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/PEA/416)	
International application No. PCT/GB 03/04232	International filing date (day/month/year) 30.09.2003	Priority date (day/month/year) 02.10.2002
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC B29C70/46		
Applicant CARBON FIBRE TECHNOLOGIES LIMITED et al.		

1. This International preliminary examination report has been prepared by this International Preliminary Examining Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.

2. This REPORT consists of a total of 5 sheets, including this cover sheet.

☒ This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, i.e. sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis for this report and/or sheets containing rectifications made before this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions under the PCT).

These annexes consist of a total of 2 sheets.

3. This report contains indications relating to the following items:

I ☒ Basis of the opinion

II ☐ Priority

III ☐ Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability

IV ☐ Lack of unity of invention

V ☒ Reasoned statement under Rule 66.2(a)(ii) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

VI ☐ Certain documents cited

VII ☐ Certain defects in the International application

VIII ☐ Certain observations on the international application

Date of submission of the demand 30.04.2004	Date of completion of this report 20.10.2004
Name and mailing address of the International preliminary examining authority: European Patent Office - P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk - Pays Bas Tel. +31 70 340 - 2040 Tx: 31 651 epo nl Fax: +31 70 340 - 3016	Authorized Officer Van Wallene, A Telephone No. +31 70 340-3611

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. **PCT/GB 03/04232**

I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the elements of the international application (*Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)*):

Description, Pages

1-11 as originally filed

Claims, Numbers

1-7 received on 28.09.2004 with letter of 21.09.2004

Drawings, Sheets

1/3-3/3 as originally filed

2. With regard to the language, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the language in which the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.
- These elements were available or furnished to this Authority in the following language: , which is:
- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of the international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).
 - ☐ the language of publication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).
 - ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rule 55.2 and/or 55.3).
3. With regard to any nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence disclosed in the international application, the international preliminary examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:
- ☐ contained in the international application in written form.
 - ☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.
 - ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.
 - ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.
 - ☐ The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.
 - ☐ The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished.
4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:
- ☐ the description, pages:
 - ☐ the claims, Nos.:
 - ☐ the drawings, sheets:

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. **PCT/GB 03/04232**

5. ☐ This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed (Rule 70.2(c)).

(Any replacement sheet containing such amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this report.)

6. Additional observations, if necessary:

V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Statement

Novelty (N)	Yes: Claims	1-7
	No: Claims	
Inventive step (IS)	Yes: Claims	1-7
	No: Claims	
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes: Claims	1-7
	No: Claims	

2. Citations and explanations

see separate sheet

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/GB 03/04232

Reference is made to the following documents:

- D1: EP-A-0 916 477 (DUQUEINE GILLES) 19 May 1999 (1999-05-19)
D2: GB-A-2 216 531 (BLATCHFORD & SONS LTD) 11 October 1989
(1989-10-11)
D3: FR-A-2 740 149 (YKK CORP) 25 April 1997 (1997-04-25)

Clarity issues in claim 1:

The expression "shape(s) and size(s)" has been interpreted as 'shape or shapes and size or sizes'.

"Distributing...around a product mould" has been interpreted as 'Distributing.... in or on a product mould'.

Novelty

None of the prior art documents show a method in accordance with claim 1 where the patches are loose and randomly distributed in or on a mould in layers. In D1 and D2, the patches are introduced in one go in the mould cavity, in D3 the patches are used to make a sheet moulding compound.

Therefore the subject matter of claim 1 and consequently its dependent claims 2 to 7 is novel.

Inventive Step

Problem:

The closest prior art is document D1.

If the patches are introduced in the mould, the fibres are oriented in an isotropic manner without any fibre orientation. Mechanical properties of the moulded article cannot be controlled and surface quality suffers.

Solution:

Distributing the patches in layers, renders the fibre orientation parallel to the mould surface. The in-plane mechanical properties as well as the surface quality are improved thereby solving the above problem.

None of the prior art documents show a moulding method where resin impregnated fibrous patches are distributed in layers in or on a mould. The solution to the above problems is therefore not rendered obvious by the prior art.

Industrial Applicability

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/GB 03/04232

The claimed subject matter is considered to be industrially applicable and thus fulfilling the requirements of article 33(4) PCT.

Further remarks:

Independent claim 1 is not in the two-part form in accordance with Rule 6.3(b) PCT, which in the present case would be appropriate, with those features known in combination from the prior art (document D1) being placed in the preamble (Rule 6.3(b)(I) PCT) and with the remaining features being included in the characterising part (Rule 6.3(b)(ii) PCT).

In the present case, the features (a), (b) and (d) are known in combination from the document D1 and belong in the preamble of such a claim.

Contrary to the requirements of Rule 5.1(a)(ii) PCT, the relevant background art disclosed in the documents D1 and D3 is not mentioned in the description, nor are these documents identified therein.

CLAIMS

1. A method of producing a laminate comprising the following steps:

- 5 (a) Forming patches from a substantially unidirectional fabric, treated with a resin
- (b) Substantially randomising the orientation of said patches
- (c) Distributing a plurality of said patches in layers around a former
- 10 (d) Causing said layers of patches to amalgamate by means of activation of the resin treatment.

2. The method of Claim 1 wherein the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a suction device.

15 3. The method of Claim 1 wherein the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a pneumatic conveyor.

20 4. The method of any of the preceding claims in which the said patches have an average surface area of no greater than 20% of the surface area of the layer formed in step (c).

5. The method of any of the preceding claims in which a multiplicity of patch shapes and/or sizes is employed.

25 6. A method of producing a laminate substantially as described herein, with reference to and as illustrated by any appropriate combination of the accompanying drawings.

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY
PCT
INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT
(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

REC'D 20 OCT 2004

WIPO PCT

01 APR 2005

Applicant's or agent's file reference PDGW/LAM1		FOR FURTHER ACTION See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/PEA/416)	
International application No. PCT/GB 03/04232	International filing date (day/month/year) 30.09.2003	Priority date (day/month/year) 02.10.2002	
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC B29C70/46			
Applicant CARBON FIBRE TECHNOLOGIES LIMITED et al.			

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These annexes consist of a total of 2 sheets.



EPO - DG 1

10. 12. 2004

(52)

3. This report contains indications relating to the following items:

I	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Basis of the opinion
II	<input type="checkbox"/>	Priority
III	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability
IV	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of unity of invention
V	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Reasoned statement under Rule 66.2(a)(ii) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement
VI	<input type="checkbox"/>	Certain documents cited
VII	<input type="checkbox"/>	Certain defects in the international application
VIII	<input type="checkbox"/>	Certain observations on the international application

Date of submission of the demand 30.04.2004	Date of completion of this report 20.10.2004
Name and mailing address of the international preliminary examining authority:  European Patent Office - P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk - Pays Bas Tel. +31 70 340 - 2040 Tx: 31 651 epo nl Fax: +31 70 340 - 3016	Authorized Officer Van Wallene, A Telephone No. +31 70 340-3611 

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. **PCT/GB 03/04232**

I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the elements of the international application (*Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)*):

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- ☐ the description, pages:
- ☐ the claims, Nos.:
- ☐ the drawings, sheets:

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. **PCT/GB 03/04232**

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**V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability;
citations and explanations supporting such statement**

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	No: Claims	
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes: Claims	1-7
	No: Claims	

2. Citations and explanations

see separate sheet

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/GB 03/04232

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Therefore the subject matter of claim 1 and consequently its dependent claims 2 to 7 is novel.

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Solution:

Distributing the patches in layers, renders the fibre orientation parallel to the mould surface. The in-plane mechanical properties as well as the surface quality are improved thereby solving the above problem.

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Industrial Applicability

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY

EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET

International application No. PCT/GB 03/04232

The claimed subject matter is considered to be industrially applicable and thus fulfilling the requirements of article 33(4) PCT.

Further remarks:

Independent claim 1 is not in the two-part form in accordance with Rule 6.3(b) PCT, which in the present case would be appropriate, with those features known in combination from the prior art (document D1) being placed in the preamble (Rule 6.3(b)(I) PCT) and with the remaining features being included in the characterising part (Rule 6.3(b)(ii) PCT).

In the present case, the features (a), (b) and (d) are known in combination from the document D1 and belong in the preamble of such a claim.

Contrary to the requirements of Rule 5.1(a)(ii) PCT, the relevant background art disclosed in the documents D1 and D3 is not mentioned in the description, nor are these documents identified therein.

28.09.2004

(96)

CLAIMS

1. A method of producing a laminate comprising the following steps:

- 5
- (a) Forming patches from a substantially unidirectional fabric, treated with a resin; the patches being formed to predetermined shape(s) and size(s) to suit the product in which the laminate is to be used;
- (b) Forming substantially loose and randomly oriented patches;
- 10 (c) Distributing said substantially loose and randomly oriented patches in layers around a product mould;
- (d) Causing said layers of patches once distributed around said product mould to amalgamate by means of activation of the resin treatment.

15 2. The method of Claim 1 wherein the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a suction device.

3. The method of Claim 1 wherein the means for distributing patches in step (c) is a pneumatic conveyor.

20 4. The method of any of the preceding claims in which the said patches have an average surface area of no greater than 20% of the surface area of the layer formed in step (c).

25 5. The method of any of the preceding claims in which a multiplicity of patch shapes and/or sizes is employed.

30 6. The method of any of the preceding claims, wherein the distributing step is carried out at a controlled temperature, whereby patches are prevented from sticking to each other during said step.

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